



Alaska rab co-chair workshop summary

On February 7, 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) sponsored its third annual Alaska Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) Co-Chair Workshop that was held at the Egan Center in Anchorage. RABs provide a forum through which members of nearby communities can provide input to the Department of Defense's (DOD) environmental cleanup program. RABs were established in Alaska at operating installations, closing or realigning installations, and formerly used defense sites where there was sufficient and sustained community interest. In attendance at the forum was DOD RAB members, regulators, community RAB members, and interested stakeholders from throughout Alaska.

This year Naval Engineering Field Activity, Northwest organized the workshop. The Masters of Ceremony for the workshop were Adak Island's Community and DOD Co-Chairs, Cathy Villa and Mark Murphy. Major General James A. Lovelace, the Army Alaska Commander, from Fort Richardson, Alaska, was the keynote speaker. There were educational breakout sessions provided based on requested education topics by the community co-chairs. The education topics and presenters were the following:

- ? The Role of Public Health in Determining the Impact on Alaskans of Contaminants in the Food Chain by Karen Pearson, Director; Elaine Christian and John Middaugh, Alaska Division of Public Health.
- ? Risk Assessment and Risk Management by Stephanie Pingree and John Halverson, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
- ? Risk Communication by Ann Lawton, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
- ? Unexploded Ordnance by Doug Murray, Engineering Field Activity, Northwest and Jim Pastorick, GeophexUXO.
- ? DOD Relative Risk Site Evaluation by Dr. Mark Prieksat, Fort Richardson.

The afternoon session were roundtable discussions that focused on the roles of RABs and they provided an information exchange for process improvement. At the close of the workshop, the Elmendorf 611th presented two success stories. DOD Co-Chair Larry Opperman presented a successful pipeline removal project that took place in Wainwright, Alaska. RAB and community input were key in development of the project. Roger Lucio, Communications Advisor, presented a five-minute videotape contrasting a RAB that wasn't functioning well in King Salmon to a more successful RAB in Barrow. The Barrow RAB portion highlighted how a once ineffective RAB became more focused and productive. Mr. Lucio pointed out that the Army, Navy and Air Force participate in the Barrow RAB.



Cathy Villa, the Adak RAB Community Co-Chair Opened the workshop on February 7, 2002.

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

Roundtable discussions dominated the afternoon's agenda. Sixty-eight people participated in small group discussions. The participants worked in groups of 8 to 10 people for more interactive discussions. Each participant was able to share their thoughts regarding relevant issues and effective improvements to the Alaska RAB process.

RAB Improvement

In general, it was agreed among the roundtable participants that the RAB process couldn't resolve all the environmental cleanup issues, although it is a good forum for exchanging ideas. Alaska is diverse geographically and culturally. Several groups recommended that DOD participants take the time to get to know the people in the communities, and be sensitive to their needs. Community members noted that DOD personnel couldn't expect to gain instant trust by showing up and explaining in one day what the risks are to a village. It was recommended that DOD involve the community from the outset of the environmental cleanup projects for a more effective cleanup.

The participants also concurred that the RAB meetings are an inappropriate forum for contractors to seek opportunities to bid on projects. As stated by one group, there is an inherent conflict when a contractor seeks employment for projects. Comments were also made that contractors must be qualified to work on the environmental cleanup projects, and oftentimes, local contractors may not be qualified. There was general agreement that there should be a priority given to local village and community hiring, if local personnel are qualified and available.

It was recommended by the participants that DOD make it clear that they are there for the long-term to cleanup sites, including monitoring institutional controls. There should be a single point of contact for each participating agency, including DOD, Tribes, ADEC, EPA, and other interested agencies.

RAB Meeting Scheduling

In order to have a more effective RAB, DOD should provide adequate time in advance of establishing RAB meeting dates. A week or two is insufficient time for people to arrange their schedules and prepare for a RAB meeting. It was also noted that DOD should



Keynote Speaker Major General James A. Lovelace, Commander Alaska Command, US Army.



Karen Pearson, Director, Division of Public Health, presents the Role of Public Health in Determining the Impact on Alaskans of Contaminants in the Food Chain

recognize that the summers are very busy months in some communities, and they can expect low turnout at RAB meetings. Several recommendations were made regarding improving the scheduling of RABs. It was suggested that before adjourning a RAB meeting, a date should be set for the following meeting. That way, the community helps participate in the scheduling. Another suggestion, relative to meetings held semiannually, was for the community co-chair to be more active in setting dates, times, and agenda items rather than DOD members making those decisions unilaterally. It was also suggested that if a meeting date cannot be established at the RAB meeting, the DOD should utilize conference calls with community members to establish a convenient date for a meeting. Another group recommended having a set schedule for meetings to allow adequate time for planning. There was a general consensus that communication of schedules was important in establishing productive, well-attended RAB meetings.



Top: John Halverson, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation presents Risk Management Principals to the participants.

Other recommendations included a suggestion that teleconferences be considered when creating an agenda and meeting date. The agenda and the RAB meeting minutes should be distributed prior to the meetings. It was also recommended that DOD distribute executive summaries or fact sheets summarizing the items on the agenda, prior to RAB meetings, in order for the community members to adequately prepare. Community members requested that DOD members send out a timely distribution of documents to repositories. Also, it was requested that letters be sent out to RAB members to announce when a document is available for review (instead of assuming that people will visit the repositories and try to find them randomly). Also, it was recommended by several groups that DOD should distribute the meeting minutes and agenda prior to the RAB meetings. It was a general consensus that there be meeting minutes that are distributed to the community to involve more people in the RAB process.

When establishing RABs, DOD members noted that it's difficult to contact the appropriate people to set up a RAB in the community. Suggestions included contacting the village/community council members, or tribal council members. It was noted that RAB meetings are not considered government-to-government consultation for Tribal members, unless it's agreed to in advance.

The cost of the RAB meetings was also discussed. Less expensive arrangements for RAB meetings should be utilized. The use of invitational orders should be utilized to bring the RAB members together at least once a year to see if there is progress in the general RAB process in Alaska.

Site Prioritization

The participants acknowledged that there was a realization of the limited DOD funding available and that in any given year there may be more work than money available. It was noted that the DOD site prioritization at some sites are not the same as some RAB members' perceptions. It was recommended that DOD go over the cleanup prioritization at least once a year to ensure the communities and regulators

have buy-in to the budget requests. It was noted that that RAB members and regulators could be an asset in the process to justify the environmental cleanup budget requests and prioritization of the projects. This would also provide the community with additional influence in the cleanup process, something that some participants' felt was lacking. One group also stated that it was important to understand how risk ranking, annual funding, consideration of other sites, national defense and homeland security and training initiatives may impact or delay site cleanups

Communication and RAB Growth

Communication was a key component of the group discussions. It was recommended that the RABs get back to the basics. Each member, whether DOD or community, should learn each other's names as a starting point. Also a need was expressed to identify the roles of the participants during the RAB meetings, in particular, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency versus the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Low community interest and attendance were mentioned as a concern of many Alaska RAB members. It was stated that attendance should not be the sole focus of RAB participation and interest, particularly for small communities.



Group Discussions recommendations were presented during the afternoon session.

Avenues should be explored to increase attendance that hasn't been used to date. For instance, Barrow used to have a low turnout at RAB meetings and then they utilized a local talk show to increase visibility and participation. There are other avenues to be explored to increase interest in the RABs.

In order to increase participation on the RABs, it was also recommended that the RABs utilize the technologies available to them to spur community participation and ignite community interest. There are local media should be utilized more often through such as radio shows or announcements, newspapers, the internet, posters at local stores, email, TV banners, and word of mouth to expand membership on the RABs.

Another suggestion to improve communication and information distribution was to establish RAB websites for villages and larger communities. It was also noted that a 30-day comment period for some documents isn't enough time for residents to review them. The DOD should consider the volume and complexity of the documents when establishing a comment period. An example of a well-communicated program was the Elmendorf Air Quality Program, which received congratulations from EPA for their community involvement efforts.

Technical Assistance Public Participation (TAPP) Grants

The attendees stressed the importance of Technical Assistance Public Participation Grants provided by the DOD. There is generally a lack of technical expertise on some RABs, and one proposed solution was to utilize the TAPP Grant program more. TAPP Grants provide the community an advisor to help them understand the more technical aspects of the environmental cleanup program. It was re-



requested that DOD members speak to individual RABs about their availability and let the community members decide whether or not these grants are a valuable tool for them to utilize.

It was also suggested that the communities utilize local university professors and graduate students rather than relying on contractors identified by DOD. There is untapped expertise in the local universities, and it's ideal for TAPP Grant opportunities.

Education



The participants presented their recommendations to improve the RAB processes in Alaska.

Community members stated that DOD should provide more training at individual RAB meetings. It's helpful when everyone is speaking from the same process and understanding. Suggested training included the cleanup process and short courses on topics identified by the RAB members to help them understand the technical aspects of the cleanup process. Others suggested the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation be brought into the education portions to help identify receptors, food chain issues, and to help identify receptors (including hunting and fishing habitats of the local community).

Community members suggested to DOD members that when presenting technical information regarding contamination risks, there also be a comparison of a similar risk that people come into contact with every day. This puts the risk assessment in perspective. For example, it was stated that there is a risk associated with aflatoxin in peanut butter, and barbecue grilling risks, that may be comparable to the risks associated with contamination at a site.

It was also suggested that the community RAB members utilize forums available to them, such as local organizations, to explain to other community members about the environmental cleanup programs and the RABs. It was also recommended that the RABs utilize existing EPA and ADEC training videos.

Environmental Cleanup Technical Input

The participants recommended that community RAB members bring their concerns to the DOD RAB members regarding living near an environmental cleanup site. It was also recommended that the DOD utilize realistic scenarios when conducting their subsistence calculations. For instance, it's rare that DOD considers the grasses and berries when conducting an ecological or subsistence baseline risk as-



assessment. The community members recommended that the stakeholders be brought into the process as early as possible to ensure the issues are addressed in a timely manner.

One group's summary recommended that DOD does not rely on a single data point to tell an entire story about a site. A more comprehensive approach should be utilized. There is an appearance that environmental cleanup is based solely on funding or lack of funding. It was recommended that DOD communicate more effectively that environmental cleanup prioritization is based on risk and the primary goal is to minimize risk at the worst sites first. It was also recommended that DOD seek community input on their risk prioritization model prior to submitting their budget requests. The participants recognized that there isn't unlimited funding, however, there should be community input into the prioritization process.

Once the DOD presents risk information to the community, they should not leave it at the numbers. It was recommended that DOD learn what the risks mean to the community, without a soft sell approach. Information is vital to residents, children, and grandchildren. If DOD is presenting risk, explain a little bit more about a chemical, rather than assume that the community understands what its health effects may be over time. For instance, explain what benzene is, how it is used, where it comes from, and what are its hazards.

Community members stated that the DOD should look toward permanent solutions. Interim action should be used to expedite the process, however, it should be consistent with the long-term remedy.

Other

There are some problems, such as debris, in a community that may have been caused by DOD that fall outside the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), or ADEC, environmental cleanup requirements. There should be an alternate source of funding for such cleanups if they are associated with DOD.

DOD should recognize that the issues are local, and that some stakeholders won't get involved unless it directly affects them. For instance on St. Lawrence Island, there was low RAB participation until subsistence activities were identified. The stakeholder participation increased.

